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FROM FRED FUNSTON.

The Register Gives the First News From the Latest Arctic Expedition.

Our Heroic Explorer Tells With His Usual Modesty the Story of His

Terrible Experiences in Making the First Stage of His Perilous Journey.

A MOST INTERESTING LETTER.

To begin with, it is hard to crowd into the space of a newspaper letter matter which properly written up would fill a book, but I shall endeavor to give the readers of the REGISTER some idea of the hardships and incidents of a seven hundred mile trip across the trackless wilderness of the upper Yukon.

There were four of us, three miners from the States going into the interior to prospect for the yellow dust on Forty-Mile creek near McQueston's Post. I had made the acquaintance of these three men on the steamer enroute from Tacoma to Juneau, and as they seemed to be pretty decent sort of fellows, we had soon agreed to try "pot luck" as far as McQueston's Post.

None of them had ever been in Alaska before or knew anything about the country, so that I, by virtue of my experience at Yakutat Bay, became a sort of Moses to the expedition, and to a large extent directed its wanderings. But I did not work on full time at the Moses business, as I had also to drag a sled and take my turn at concocting flap-jacks and other indigestible bric-a-brac.

We reached Juneau on the morning of April 8th, and bought our outfit consisting of tents, a supply of flour, bacon, beans and coffee, and two hand sleds, each eight feet long, and a whip-saw and other tools for boat building. These articles with the blankets, guns and ammunition that we had brought with us, weighed about one thousand pounds.

The next day we engaged a small steam tug to convey ourselves and outfit to the head of Chilkoot Inlet, a hundred miles north of Juneau, the most available point on the coast from which to reach the headwarters of the Yukon. It was just daybreak on the 10th that the little tug landed us on the sandy beach at the head of the inlet, and with a parting salute from her whistle, steamed away to the southward. We watched her disappear through the fog and mist, the last we were to see of civilization for nearly two years. Surely we had done the Cortez act with a vengance. We had burned our ships, figuratively speaking, and between us and the next habitation of civilized man lay seven hundred miles peopled only by a few half naked savages.

There was an Indian village about a mile back from the beach, and in a short time we were waited upon by a delegation, the delegation consisting of every one that was able to walk, about a hundred of them, men, women and children, with the usual proportion of our dogs,—three to each Indian.

It was our plan to ascend the Taija river to its source in the coast range of mountains, cross this range at Chilkoot Pass, and descend to Lake Linderman in the British Northwest Territory, and then follow the chain of frozen lakes that form the headwaters of the Yukon. The mountains that we were to cross as seen from from the coast presented a cheerless prospect, looming up into the sky, white with snow from base to summit.

Of course we knew that we would do well to get ourselves to the summit of the Pass through the deep snow without having anything to carry, and so set about engaging the Indians, who are expert packers, to bring along our stuff as far as the summit of the range, intending to drag it on our sleds from this point until we found a suitable place to build our boat. In the negotiations for packers I found that the limited knowledge of the Thlinket language that I had acquired at Yakutat last year was almost indispensible. We were anxious to start the next day, but they would not hear to it because a child had died that morning, and on the morrow the body was to be burned on a great funeral pyre, and none of them was willing to miss such a cheerful spectacle. So we idled away all of the next day, while the savages cremated the unfortunate youngster and made the woods ring far into the night with their chanting, yelling and beating of drums. It is my unbiased opinion that this is a great field for "some good earnest man" to establish a school of manners and morals, running the same as a sort of side-show to a well patronized chain-gang and whipping-post. It has been some time since I have seen a band of savages who so thoroughly need a little discipline as do these Chilkoot Thlinkets.

At 7 a. m. of the 12th we got started with our Indian packers, five men and two women, while several small boys trotted along as if such little tours were an every day matter with them. The Indians carried their loads on their backs, the weight being supported by bands of deer-skin, one passing around each shoulder and one across the forehead.

My three companions dragged along the two empty sleds, while I was detailed to walk with the Indians and keep an eye on them, and carried nothing except my camera and rifle. Our route for the first five miles lay along the banks of the Taiya river, a swift, turbulent stream about thirty feet wide and two feet deep, whose ice-cold waters we had to wade many times in order to avoid impassible places and thick undergrowth. As we approached the mountains small patches of snow were found here and there in the forest, and before the day was half gone we were wading in it knee deep. When we started the sun was shining brightly and all the indications were for favorable weather, but now the sky was overcast and soon the big flakes were falling so thickly that one could hardly see a hundred yards ahead. In the evening, tired, wet, and hungry we reached the entrance to a gloomy canon, and camped for the night. The snow was here more than two feet deep, but we cleared off a space large enough to build a fire, and prepared our sumptuous repast of bacon, flap-jacks and coffee. We did not trouble to put up a tent, but strewing a number of spruce boughs over the snow rolled up in our blankets, not even removing our wet clothing, and slept as only worn out men can sleep,—white men, Indians, kids and dogs all in one big heap. It snowed all night, snowed as it never did and never will in Kansas, but it kept us only that much warmer. The next morning at the unseemly hour of five we were on our way again floundering through the snow none of us knew how deep and more falling all the time. Only one incident of note occurred during the day. One of the Indians had on the previous day shown an unruly disposition and an inclination to usurp my place as Moses of the outfit and this morning threw down his pack and announced his intention to return at once to the bosom of his family. I had been expecting something of this kind and knew that it one went all would go and leave us in a pretty fix, and,—well, maybe I had better let the others tell what happened, anyhow he shouldered his pack again with what might be termed indecent haste and from that time was a model of meekness. At noon we reached the upper limit of timber, the real beginning of the Pass, but it was too late in the day to attempt to reach the next timber on the opposite side of the range, and so camped until the next morning. The snow was here about six feet deep on a level, but considering the circumstances we passed a fairly comfortable night. Just before dark there was a lull in the storm and the weather cleared up so that we got a good view of the dreaded Pass, and it was enough to make the cold chills chase one another up and down a fellows' backbone, stretching nearly a mile above us, and as steep as the roof of a house. At four o'clock the next morning the five Indian men leaving the women and children in camp, carried half of the stuff to the summit, and leaving it there returned for the remainder. This time we went with them, zig-zaging and winding up that terrific slope of snow. The Indians, in dread of avalanches, carried open knives in their hands with which to cut the lashings of their packs so that they could run in case they saw the snow above coming down on them. When I used to attend school out at Maple Grove some fifteen years ago I was considered a pretty fair sprinter, especially when I got more than I could handle in a fist fight, but this thing of outrunning avalanches was something that I never got much practice in, and to begin it now was simply appalling, especially when I recall that any one of the big snow-slides that I saw in the St. Elias range last year would make an express train ashamed of itself. But the avalanches did not come worth a cent and in the course of time we stood on the narrow crust that separates the drainage of the Yukon from that of the coast. The view northward from the Pass would have been magnificent to any one looking for scenery, which we were not. Mountains, hills and vallys were literally burried in snow, not a tree, shrub, rock or any speck of color being visable above the unbroken mantle of white, the wooded shores of Lake Linderman, distant about eight miles, being hidden from view by an intervening range of hills.

The Indians, having delivered their loads were paid off and started at once on their return to the coast, first pointing out to us the direction we were to take to reach the Lake. It was a comfort to see the rascals depart and to know that we were no longer dependent on their whims and caprices.

We loaded our outfit on the two hand sleds, five hundred pounds on each, and started down. For the first half mile the slope was so steep that we had to hold back on the sleds to keep them from getting away with us, but we soon reached a comparatively level "bench" about two miles across, where it required all the efforts of two men to drag one of the sleds through the deep freshly fallen snow. During the forenoon the weather had been quite favorable, but now proceeded to make another disgraceful exhibition of itself and treated us to a blizzard which lasted all afternoon and all night. The wind sweeping down from the north filled the air so full of the loose snow that we could not see fifty feet in any direction and piled up great drifts like the sand hills of the southwest. We struggled against the storm until we saw that it was hopeless to bring both sleds through, and then leaving one sled and the greater part of our stuff, loaded only our blankets and a little provisions onto the other, tried it again, all four pulling on one rope. For a time we floundered along in this way, but made such poor progress that we saw that we would not reach timber before darkness set in. We were already numbed with cold and our clothing, which had been wet for three days, was frozen stiff. It was a plain case that if we remained out in that storm all night without a fire we would furnish a fine "lay out" for some enterprizing coroner before morning, and so shouldering our blankets, which was all we could carry, and leaving the sled and provision behind, struck out down a canon to find timber. Just at dark we reached a considerable grove of stunted spruce trees, about three miles from where we had abandoned the last sled, and finding a partially protected spot under the walls of the canon, built a fire and remained by it all night, the storm howling dismally around us. Shortly after our arrival at this charming spot I made the joyous discovery that both my ears were frozen stiff. We got a little sleep during the night and awoke the next morning stiff and hungry, for we had not eaten a mouthful since the previous morning. The wind had died out and the sun was shining brightly when we started back after the abandoned sleds, the glare of the light being so strong that we wore goggles to prevent snow blindness. Going back about five miles we found, after some difficulty, the first sled abandoned yesterday and dragged it down to our camp. It was dark again when we reached the woods, and the supper that we ate that night, the first opportunity we had had to cook, broke our fast of two days and one night. The next day we went back to where the second sled had been left, about three miles, and brought it down with its load.

Not fifty feet from our camp a powerful spring of clear water issued from a cleft in the canon walls, forming a stream about a foot across and several inches deep which soon disappears underneath the snow. It was the very beginning of the Yukon, one of the mightiest rivers on the face of the earth, which after a tortuous route of two thousand miles passes into Norton Sound its mighty flood, four miles from bank to bank.

Early the next morning we were on our way again dragging down the canon our two heavily loaded sleds, and in less than an hour came out upon the frozen surface of Lake Lindeman. This lake, like all others on the upper Yukon, received its name from that brave but unfortunate man, the late Frederick Schwatka, who passed through this region ten years ago. It is about four miles long and more than a quarter broad, and is frozen solid for nine months of every year. When we reached it, the freshly fallen snow had nearly all been blown off from the surface of the ice, leaving only the old snow which had a heavy crust and was excellent sledding. We made good progress, and before noon had reached the end of the lake and passed down the small stream connecting it with Lake Bennett, a narrow body of water, or rather of ice, stretching to the north almost as straight as an arrow for twenty-six miles. After sledding for about five miles down this lake we camped for the night on its west shore. It was now comfortably warm when the sun was shining, but water froze about an inch every night. The next day a strong wind was blowing from the south, and we took advantage of it by rigging a mast on each sled and hoisting a tent as a sail. The result was that all the work we did that day was to hold back with all our strength when the wind blew too hard or when we reached a stretch of "glare ice." Much of the time we had to run to keep up. This day we covered all that remained of Lake Bennett and half of Lake Nares, twenty-one miles in all, not a bad day's work. The shores of these frozen lakes are composed of rugged hills and low mountains on whose sides is a fringe of stunted spruce and pine trees. We

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